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Domestic Radical Islamic Insurgency by Ones and Twos and the Politics of Self-Delusion

Robert J. Bunker and Hakim Hazim

The contention being made is that governmental officials are downplaying a threat to the US homeland—that compromised of a small, yet virulent, component of domestic radical Islamic insurgency derived from the actions of one and two man cells. While a well intended policy, such actions may be in actuality setting up our nation for some sort of disaster down the road.

With this said, no overarching conspiracy is implied to be taking place with the suppression of this threat, but rather that incremental policies and decisions appear to be promoting this public policy. The motivations behind such policies surely vary but appear to be centered on not unnecessarily alarming the American public or causing them further fear and consternation. With the burden of economic hardships, high levels of unemployment, bankruptcies, and foreclosures, health concerns over the H1N1 virus, and the other trials and tribulations of today's world, the American public is, in a sense, being protected for its own good. Further, due to both considerations of 'political correctness' on one hand and appropriate concerns over 'witch hunts' and Islam-bashing on the other, any discussion of domestic Islamic self-radicalization quickly becomes a highly politicized topic. As a result, it is officially better to attribute any form of violence undertaken due to self-radicalization as a manifestation of mental health issues or heightened emotional states instead of being symptomatic of radical Islamic yearnings derived from one's own internalized metric of rationality.

One may argue that, in order to ensure an appropriate homeland security posture, the perception of threat and the actual threat that exists should always be closely intertwined. Not only should the American government be accurate in its understanding of what the actual threats to homeland security are but it is critical that the American public also be informed and educated in a similar manner. The greater the divergence between the threat reality that exists and the perception of that reality held by the American public, the greater the potential for some sort of disaster to take place.

Disaster in this usage is derived from any one of two domestic outcomes taking place. The first outcome is that of a "blindside attack". The American public, ignorant or ill informed of a threat, are literally stupefied by one or more terrorist incidents. High levels of terror and disruption ensue and the average citizen is left reeling, unable to come to grips with what has just transpired. The second outcome is that of an "overreaction" to a threat that has suddenly made itself known in the eyes of the American public. Mob behavior, senseless violence, and the passage of draconian policies and measures—such as the loss of personal freedoms in exchange

for higher levels of security—are all possible second order effects that may take place from such an outcome.

In support of the contention that the threat of a small yet virulent component of domestic radical Islamic insurgency is being downplayed by US governmental officials, what evidence can be offered up for judgment? Some specific incidents are as follows:

- CIA Headquarters, Virginia, 25 January 1993. Mir Aimal Kasi was a Pakistani immigrant who killed 2 and wounded 3 in his active shooter attack outside of the CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Kasi said that he had decided to kill CIA employees after he purchased an AK-47 assault rifle. His roommate told police that Kasi would get angry over watching CNN reports of Muslims being killed in the Middle East by US forces. During his trial, his attorneys stated that he had a history of mental illness. He was executed by lethal injection in November 2002.
- Empire State Building, New York, 24 February 1997. Ali Hassan Abu Kamal shot seven people on the observation deck of the Empire State Building. He held a passport from Ramallah, the West Bank, and was reportedly overheard shouting “Are you from Egypt?” before opening fire upon the innocent bystanders. Kamal shot himself before the authorities could reach him and died 5 hours later in the hospital. Kamal’s motive for the shootings were to punish the US for its support of Israel, according to his daughter who worked for the UN.
- Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), California, 4 July 2002. While standing in line at the counter of El Al Airlines, Hesham Mohamed Hadayet opened fire and killed two people and wounded 4 others. Security personnel subsequently killed Hadayet. The attack, oddly enough, took place on his birthday. US authorities were quick to point out that this was an isolated incident and merely a criminal act; the Israeli government had a very different view of the matter. US officials later quietly agreed this was a terrorist act.
- Beltway, Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia, October 2002. John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo targeted and killed over 10 people in what became known as the Beltway sniper attacks. Muhammad, a Nation of Islam convert, followed a do-it-yourself version of Islam that contained strong elements of Black Nationalism. Muhammad’s military marksmanship training and affinity for Al Qaeda proved to be a deadly combination. The younger Malvo was apparently brainwashed by Muhammad and believed he was engaging in God’s work.
- University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma, 1 October 2005. Joel Henry Hinrichs III was killed by the detonation of an improvised explosive device (IED) in his backpack outside of the packed Oklahoma Memorial Stadium on a Saturday evening. No one else was injured. Hinrich’s case is shrouded in mystery and conspiracy with purported links to radical Islamic literature found on his computer. The IED was constructed from triacetone triperoxide (TATP), a highly unstable explosive commonly used by Palestinian suicide bombers. The investigation into his death was quickly closed and ruled by officials to be nothing more than a suicide attempt by a troubled student.

- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 3 March 2006. Mohammed Reza Taheri-azar is an Iranian-American born citizen who drove a Jeep Cherokee into a crowd of students at the University of North Carolina. His intent was to avenge the death of Muslims worldwide and to punish the United States. Mohammed stated that he looked forward to defending himself in court and sharing the law of Allah. In a letter he wrote, he said one of his role models was Mohamed Atta—a 9/11 ringleader. He was convicted of 9 counts of attempted murder and 9 counts of assault with a deadly weapon. He is currently serving a 33 year term in prison.
- Seattle Jewish Federation, Washington, 28 July 2006. Active shooter Nafeed Afzal Haq killed 1 woman and wounded 5 others at the Seattle Jewish Federation in the Beltown neighborhood of Seattle. He shouted “ I am a Muslim, angry at Israel” before engaging in personal Jihad. This incident is unique as Haq was of Pakistani descent, disavowed Islam to become a Christian, and apparently later reconverted to Islam. The process of self-radicalization combined with Haq being mentally ill— he probably suffered from a bipolar disorder— resulted in a deadly mix.
- Little Rock, Arkansas, 1 June 2009. Carlos Bledsoe, AKA Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, is accused of shooting two Army recruiters, killing 1 in the process at an Army Recruiting Center. This was a premeditated act that included the scouting of other recruiting centers, a day care, a post office, and a Baptist church in at least five states. Police reports say that he had political and religious motivation for engaging in his acts of violence. Muhammad is a Muslim convert who had recently returned from Yemen, a known Al Qaeda base of operations, and was under investigation for his extremist activities.
- Fort Hood, Texas, 5 November 2009. Nidal Malik Hasan is the Fort Hood murderer who yelled “Allah Akbar” (God is Great) as he proceeded to kill 13 and wound dozens more in an active shooter incident. He openly declared his disagreement with the war in Afghanistan and was upset over his upcoming deployment. Many warning signs were ignored concerning his behavior including his open presentation of radical Islamic materials and his taking of additional small arms training which was at variance with his Medical Corps occupational branch specialty. Immediately following the incident the media, officials, and other Muslims declared him to be a mentally ill person or mad man whose actions had nothing to do with his radical beliefs.

What is most intriguing about this pattern of omission is that it is derived from one-to-two man terrorist based incidents that were not interdicted. In almost all of these incidents, the blood of US citizens actually flowed on the street. When a larger terrorist cell is uncovered by federal officials, typically while still in the planning phases with its members arrested and then prosecuted, it is then considered part of the bonafide radical Islamic terrorist threat to our homeland. One and two man terrorist cells who adhere to principals of self-radicalization, in what can be considered a form of ‘leaderless resistance’, and view themselves as individual ‘Soldiers of Allah’ apparently do not fit the appropriate official threat criteria. Good news concerning foiled terrorist plots is thus broadcast while terrorism related bad news is suppressed

and censored and becomes attributed to the actions of mentally unstable individuals. Such governmental tactics are commonly used in wartime and none would argue the fact that radical Islamic networks are engaged in a holy war that has now spread to many areas of the globe. Yet, as a result, an integral component of the radical Islamic insurgency that is taking place on American soil, while embryonic and still relatively small and manageable, is being significantly downplayed to the public.

As afore mentioned, this has potentially disastrous and possibly even strategic implications. Not only are we making ourselves nationally vulnerable to blindside attacks and subsequent public policy overreaction but government officials may actually delude themselves strategically due to their suppression of this domestic radical Islamic threat component. It is far easier to penetrate and compromise larger radical Islamic cells, which to date have been basically somewhat incompetent and inept ‘gangs of guys’ seeking to engage in terrorist acts, than to identify one and two man radical Islamic leaderless resistance cells. Those small cells have been achieving operational success while the larger cells have since 9-11 thus far been interdicted domestically.

The violent activities of lone wolves and two man bands are extremely difficult to track and prevent. One must not forget that there are a number of people within the US who are willing to participate in open violence against the government. Zealous operatives actively seek martyrdom that will guarantee paradise or at the very least an opportunity to live on in the memories of the people they believe they are fighting for. Radicalization is a state of mind that can prove lethal when people act against their country in the name of their faith. It would be a mistake to discount the actions of these individuals as nothing more than the motivation of “mad men” lashing out at the world.

The great concern from a strategic perspective is that governmental officials will start to drink their own ‘spiked punch’ and delude themselves into believing that the many terrorist incidents listed in this essay are in actuality the actions of mentally unstable and delusional individuals and nothing more. This would mean that our domestic intelligence and interdiction capabilities are performing flawlessly with the ensuing pats on the back, ‘atta-boys’, and political kudos being exchanged. Such a refusal to candidly acknowledge the ones and twos radical Islamic threat domestically is somewhat reminiscent of 1990s roles and missions debate in the US Army concerning Operations Other Than War (OOTW).

That debate centered on to what extent the Army should engage in non-conventional warfare operations—the view then held by many was that OOTW should not be a real Army mission of concern since it had nothing to do with actual warfighting. In retrospect, it eventually became understood that, while OOTW had nothing to do with warfare between states, it in actuality was an umbrella concept that included non-state warfare. That other form of warfighting involving terrorists, insurgents, cartel enforcers, and assorted criminal-entities has since gone on to dominate contemporary military deployments and patterns of conflict. This was not necessarily the mission the Army or the other armed services desired but it is the one that they got. It was ultimately very beneficial for the Army that the OOTW debate took place.

What is now needed is a governmental and federal law enforcement debate focusing on the broader spectrum of the domestic radical Islamic threat. This new debate on ‘Ones and Twos’

should revisit conventional views on terrorist groups and their organization. Specifically, while non-state warfare can be waged by larger radical Islamic cells, i.e. those which have been successfully interdicted such as the 2002 Lackawanna, New York (Muktar al-Bakri et al); 2005 Lodi, California (Hayat family et al); 2007 Fort Dix, New Jersey (Duka family et al); and 2009 New York (Najibullah Zazi et al) groups, it must also ask whether cells composed of ones and twos are not now also part of this threat spectrum. If ignored and simply labeled as ‘other than war (or terrorist)’ incidents, we may find ourselves with a homeland security capability superbly suited to combat large (and more conventional) cells belonging to the radical Islamic network but not the smaller and to date more effective ones. Such roles and missions would thus be deemed outside of current counter-terrorism operations even though they too may become not necessarily the mission US governmental agencies and personnel desire but the one that they end up with.

In the process, some consideration should be given to openly informing and educating the American public about the broadening radical Islamic threat spectrum. As a free and democratic people, some of who individually may end up in future crosshairs on American soil, we at the very least owe them this. In fact, it is best to build additional bonds of trust now, treat our people with some level of maturity, and tell them like it is. Basically, we’ve had a number of past incidents in which self-radicalized individuals have professed loyalty to Al Qaeda or to other radical Islamic entities or simply tenets and we expect more incidents to follow. As a nation, we recognize these threat potentials, even one that is currently very minor and has taken place only sporadically, and are doing everything in our power to address the process of Islamic self-radicalization now taking place on American soil and the ensuing violence that comes with it. Far better to promote this public policy than the other one that ignores an issue which has the potential to grow and continues to attribute an increasing number of active shootings, and quite possibly future bombings, to mentally ill individuals— individuals who just coincidentally also spout out radical Islamic rhetoric and doctrines.

Authors’ Note—As this essay went to publication, some official views on domestic Islamic radicalization may now be finally changing due to the recent Fort Hood shooting incident. See Sebastian Rotella “U.S. Sees Homegrown Muslim Extremism as Rising Threat.” *Los Angeles Times*. Monday, December 7, 2009. p. A1, A13.

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